tucky and of the westerly half of Tennessee by the Confederates would be rendered imperative; and, in addition, they would be forced to give up many of their strong-holds on the Mississippi River in the States of Kentucky and Tennessee, from the impossibility of supplying them with provisions, or even keeping up communications with them, after the Confederate forces had retired from the territory in their vicinity, unless, indeed, the Confederates should obtain control of the Mississippi River itself,—a supposition so improbable as hardly to be worth serious attention.

The Federal Government, seeing the immense importance of securing the control of these inland waters, began, even as early as the spring of 1861 to fit out a fleet of vessels specially designed for service on them; and in the summer and autumn the work was pushed forward as rapidly as was possible in view of the other demands on the administration.

Naval officers of distinction, Commander John Rodgers, and, after him, Flag-Officer Foote, were sent to the West to superintend the building and equipment of these vessels. They were of two kinds,—ordinary steamers, converted into ships of war, and entirely new vessels, specially constructed for the exigencies of fighting on the western

rivers. Those of the former description were first finished, and some of them took part in the action at Belmont on the Mississippi on November 7, 1861. The whole fleet was ready in January, 1862.

While there were in 1861 several lines of railroad capable of being used to facilitate military opera-